

Jonah – An Old Testament Minor Prophet

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Overview: The LORD called Jonah to travel to Nineveh, the capital city of Assyria, to call that wicked city to repent. Initially Jonah refused to go; however, with the LORD's persuasion, Jonah went, Jonah proclaimed the LORD's message, and the people of Nineveh did repent. Then, through a series of events, the LORD taught Jonah a lesson on being merciful.

Date of Writing: 790 B.C. Keep in mind that Israel, the northern kingdom, was conquered by Assyria in 722 B.C.

Luther on Jonah: ...Jonah lived at the time of King Jeroboam [II]..., at the time when King Uzziah reigned in Judah. This was also the time at which the prophets Hosea, Amos, and Joel were living in the same kingdom of Israel in other places and towns.

But greater than all he did in his own nation were his attacks upon the great and mighty kingdom of Assyria and his fruitful preaching among the Gentiles... It was as though God willed to demonstrate by him the word of Isaiah, "He who has not heard, shall hear it," as an illustration of the fact that they who have the word richly despise it thoroughly, and they who cannot have it accept it gladly. Christ himself says, in Matthew 21[:43], "The kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to the nations producing the fruits of it." (AE 35:323–24)¹

Blessings for Readers: As you read Jonah, reflect on God's purposes for your life. Day by day we make decisions and plan our future, but the prophet Jonah describes just how far the Almighty will go to fulfill His plans for us and through us. (TLSB, 1479)

Outline: Jonah, as good literature, presents the true story and events of the prophet's life as the scenes of a play, as shown by this outline.

- ♦ Scene I: Account of Jonah's Call and His Reaction (1:1–3)
- ♦ Scene II: Onboard Ship in the Midst of a Storm at Sea (1:4–17)
- ♦ Scene III: Inside the Great Fish (ch 2)
- ♦ Scene IV: Yahweh Gives Jonah His Assignment a Second Time (3:1–3)
- ♦ Scene V: Jonah Delivers the Message; Nineveh's Response (3:4–10)
- ♦ Scene VI: Jonah's Prayer in Nineveh (4:1–3)
- ♦ Scene VII: Jonah Sits Outside the City of Nineveh; Yahweh Teaches a Lesson on Mercy (4:4–11) (TLSB, 1479)

Jonah Flees the Presence of the LORD (1:1-6):

1. Read vv. 1-3:
 - a. *Nineveh*. Capital of Assyria, a powerful, ruthless nation more than 500 mi NE of Jonah's hometown in Israel.

¹ Engelbrecht, E. A. (2009). *The Lutheran Study Bible* (p. 1478). St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House.

- b. *evil has come up before Me*. Later, Nahum would charge Nineveh with plotting against the Lord, wanton cruelty, prostitution, materialism, and arrogance. *That sounds similar to the U.S.A.*
 - c. *Jonah rose to flee*. His response was a jarring aberration for a servant of the Lord. Scripture nowhere reports that any other prophet disobeyed God's call.
 - d. *the presence of the LORD*. Repeated twice in v 3 and again in v 10 to emphasize Jonah's misconception that somehow he could escape from the Lord by getting out of Israel. *Let's read Psalm 139:1-10.*
2. Read vv. 4-6: *each cried out to his god*. These experienced sailors realized they needed supernatural help to survive this unusual storm, showing more religious fervor than Jonah did. Luther: "Reason is unable to identify God properly; it cannot ascribe the Godhead to the One who is entitled to it exclusively. It knows that there is a God, but it does not know who or which is the true God.... Reason never finds the true God, but it finds the devil or its own concept of God, ruled by the devil. So there is a vast difference between knowing that there is a God and knowing who or what God is. Nature knows the former—it is inscribed in everybody's heart; the latter is taught only by the Holy Spirit" (AE 19:54–55). (TLSB, 1480)

Jonah Is Thrown into the Sea (1:7-16):

3. Read vv. 7-10:
- a. *cast lots*. The crew wanted to know whom to blame for such a tempestuous storm.
 - b. *the lot fell on Jonah*. God, who controlled the storm, also controlled the outcome of casting lots. Jonah thought he could run away from the Lord's presence, but God demonstrated His reign over every detail of the situation. (TLSB, 1480)
4. Read vv. 11-16:
- a. Jonah's simple confession of faith (v 9) led these pagan sailors to realize that the Lord had sent the storm. They directed their prayers to the only One who could intervene and save them. Interpreters differ on whether the sailors were truly converted or simply added the Lord (Yahweh) to their list of deities...
 - b. **1:7–16** God used Jonah's disobedience as a learning opportunity for him and for the ship's crew. Jonah had an opportunity to compare his indifference and hostility toward Nineveh with the sailors' concern for his life. And the sailors are able to learn of the true God through Jonah's confession of faith and God's control of the sea. Amazingly, even when we break God's Law and receive punishment, He often turns the situation into a learning experience and an opportunity for us to confess and praise Him. (TLSB, 1481)

A Great Fish Swallows Jonah (1:17): Read v. 17: Jonah thinks he will die by drowning in the sea, and that should be the outcome of his refusal to obey God. But God has other plans for Jonah. The great fish saves him from drowning and gives him pause to consider his situation and his role in carrying out God's will. (TLSB, 1481)

Jonah's Prayer (2:1-10):

5. Read vv. 1-9:

- a. What is the benefit of God allowing us to be in situations of distress? (v. 2) _____

- b. *Sheol*. Place of the dead. Jonah's descent into the sea was like descending into Sheol, the grave. (TLSB, 1481)
- c. Vv. 3-6a: They tell of Jonah's complete helplessness; therefore, he knows he owes his life to God. His response is to do God's will.
 - i. What percentage of your life and possessions do you attribute to God? _____%
 - ii. What percentage do you follow God's Word with your life? _____%
 - iii. What percentage do you follow God's Word with your possessions? _____%
- d. Vv. 6b-7: When Jonah's life seemed all but over, he cried to the LORD in repentance – *sorrow and faith* – and He heard.
- e. Vv. 8-9: Our trust in idols separates us from God, but, *through our trust in Him*, we are blessed now and forever.
 - i. First Commandment: "You shall have no others gods before Me." (Ex. 20:3 NAS) What does this mean? We should fear, love, and trust in God above all things.
 - ii. Does any Christian perfectly keep the first commandment? Y N
 - iii. What else tries to gain our trust? _____
 - iv. Why, *as repentant ones*, should we be at peace? _____

6. Read v. 10: *the LORD spoke to the fish*. God rules over all creation, including animals and fish.... The Lord who teaches donkeys to speak (Nu 22:28) likewise teaches fish to listen. (TLSB, 1482)

Jonah Goes to Nineveh (3:1-5):

7. Read vv. 1-3a: This time Jonah obeyed.

8. Read vv. 3b-4: Jonah entered the city of his enemies, Nineveh – the great capital city of Assyria, to call them to repent.

The People of Nineveh Repent (3:5-10):

9. Read vv. 5-9: Amazingly the people and the king believed Jonah's message and repented of their sins.

10. Read v. 10: The message was repent or else, so the people of the city did repent and God did not bring about the overthrow of Nineveh at that time (however, many years later, they became wicked again and were destroyed; Nahum prophesies that destruction).

Jonah's Anger and the LORD's Compassion (4:1-11):

11. Read vv. 1-3: Now we have heard the true reason from Jonah himself why he initially tried to flee from the LORD when he was told to go to Nineveh to call them to repent.
 - a. Nineveh was the capital city of Jonah's enemy. What did Jonah want for Nineveh?

 - b. Jonah was so upset about Nineveh repenting that he preferred death over life; however, he still saw the LORD as the ultimate giver and taker of life.
12. Read v. 4: **With this rhetorical question, God gently endeavored to get Jonah to reconsider his attitude. (TLSB, 1483)**
13. Read v. 5: Jonah made a shelter for himself where he could wait to see whether or not the LORD's destruction would come in forty days as he had proclaimed.
14. Read vv. 6-9: Notice that the LORD appointed a plant to provide shade, a worm to remove the shade, and a scorching wind to make Jonah miserable; then he wanted to die.
15. Read vv. 10-11: People (eternal souls) are much more important than plants:
 - a. Jonah cared about the plant that shaded him, but not about the people of Nineveh.
 - b. The LORD cared about the people of Nineveh who were Gentiles, in their sins, and on the path to eternal punishment.
16. **Chapter 4 Summary:**
 - a. **Jonah had a precious opportunity to preach God's Word to Nineveh, but his heart was not in it. He did not seem to understand the extent of God's concern for people who are enemies of Israel, and he hoped that misfortune would come to them.**
 - b. **We have the immense privilege of sharing God's Law and Gospel with the world around us. We have opportunities to be part of His plans. May we never be found guilty of neglecting our mission to make disciples of all nations. Praise God, He did not neglect us but appointed His only-begotten Son as our Savior.**
 - c. **Let us pray: O Lord, reveal to me every opportunity I have to share the good news of salvation with others, no matter who they are. Then move me to share Your Word. Amen. (TLSB, 1484)**